

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

Roger Nowell High Sheriff of Lancashire, a wicked man who betrayed the innocent.

Once upon a time in the quaint village of Read, Lancashire, there lived a man named Roger Nowell. Born into a respected family, Roger was the son of Roger Nowell and Florence Atkinson, and he carried the family's legacy with pride.

As Roger grew older, he formed a close bond with his presumed brother, John Nowell. Their companionship was evident when John stood witness at Roger's marriage in 1581, marking the beginning of a new chapter in Roger's life.

Around the turn of the century, Roger made a significant purchase, acquiring property in Heyhouses, Lancashire. This investment reflected his ambition and desire to establish himself as a landowner in the region. Roger's dedication and shrewdness did not go unnoticed, and in 1610, he was appointed as the High Sheriff of Lancashire, a prestigious position of authority and responsibility.

Roger's life took an unexpected turn when he was thrust into a notorious episode that would etch his name in history. In 1612, Roger, serving as a Justice of the Peace for Lancashire, found himself at the center of a controversy surrounding a pedlar named John Law. Law's family claimed he had fallen victim to witchcraft, and it was Roger's duty to investigate the matter.

With a sense of duty and impartiality, Roger commenced a thorough examination of the claims made by John Law's family. On April 12, 1612, he presided over a hearing that would send shockwaves through the region. Convinced by the evidence presented, Roger made the decision to commit four women, two of whom were blind and in their eighties, to the confines of Lancaster Gaol, where they awaited trial for witchcraft.

But the saga did not end there. On April 27, 1612, together with another magistrate, Roger committed eight more individuals, six women, and two men, to Lancaster Gaol on similar charges. These individuals were accused of participating in a gathering that took place on Good Friday, April 10, 1612. This gathering, as alleged, involved witchcraft and dark arts.

The events that unfolded during that fateful summer saw numerous alleged witches brought to trial at Lancaster. Many of them, including those Roger had committed to prison, were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. These unfortunate souls became known as the Pendle witches, forever etching their names in the annals of history.

Despite his involvement in this notorious episode, Roger Nowell's life continued beyond the trials. Time passed, and Roger's days were filled with the responsibilities that came with his vast holdings. On January 30, 1624, Roger Nowell breathed his last breath in Whalley, Lancashire. The following day, he was laid to rest in the hallowed grounds of Whalley, leaving behind a legacy interwoven with both praise and controversy.

An Inquisition Post Mortem revealed the extent of Roger's wealth and possessions. His estates included the manors of Read and Great Harwood, along with various properties in Lancashire, such as Church, Symonston, Hinckley, and Whalley. Additionally, Roger owned the esteemed manor of East Bradford in Yorkshire, as well as properties in Wakefield, Loftus, Wentbridge, Thorpe Audhill, Darrington, and Oscropp, all located within the bounds of Yorkshire.

Roger Nowell's story was one of ambition, responsibility, and the weight of justice. From his humble beginnings in Read, Lancashire, to his pivotal role in the Pendle witch trials, his life was marked by both triumph and controversy. As the years passed, his name and deeds became part of the tapestry that wove together the history of the region, forever remembered for his role in one of the most infamous witch trials in England's past.

By Donald Jay.